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# TRUE BLUE

STIRRING STORIES OF NAVAL ACADEMY LIFE



## THE NEW CADET

OR

FARADAY IN STRANGE COMPANY

BY

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# The New Cadet.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE NEW PLEBE.

"Attention!"

"Forward!"

Tramp-tramp.

In graceful file, a dozen cadets passed swiftly along in the shadow of the wall surrounding the grounds of Annapolis Naval Academy.

"What's up?" a whisper ran the ranks.

"Blest if we know!" fluttered back again.

"Order, there!" commanded Clif Farady, in the lead.

"This must be official?" muttered tall Fishcake, audibly.

"Call it so," vouchsafed Clif. "Now then, speedy as you can across the open here without noise to the rifle pits."

"What's waiting there?" breathed little Nanny expectantly.

"You wait and see," nodded the popular cadet.

The "company" was rather in charge than under command.

First Class of the naval institution was having its "show day," and the academy superintendent had appointed cadet guardians for the unemployed.

They were to be kept in order and out of mischief, and Clif—skilled, a favorite and reliable—had naturally come in for "a commission."

Some formal drill had been gone through during the



early forenoon hours, but the last one of the plebes voted the general layout that of a holiday.

Now as Clif, who had been taking a brief stroll, returned on a somewhat rapid walk to the squad lounging under the trees of the gun park, and gave the sharp order, "Attention!" all responded magically.

To put it as Nanny had whispered, there was "fire in Clif Faraday's eyes," and, consequently, "trouble was brewing!"

They advanced towards a slight rise. Beyond that the rifle pits and practice ground would be in view, and all hands counted on "seeing things."

Well-headed for the crest, a disappointing order came—

"Halt!"

Then Clif ran out from the group briskly some twenty paces, and called to a figure just passing a turn in the wall:

"I say, Dazey!"

The party challenged turned promptly.

"I'm swinging on you," he insinuated.

"A few words with you, if you please."

"That's easy."

The free-and-easy cadet whom Clif had hailed, advanced with a questioning face as he spoke.

The deserted contingent took a stare, dubious but unanimous.

Half of them grinned, as if the new comer revived some animated memory.

Half looked fairly surprised that their leader should check what promised a hurried dash, to "patter with a fresh" whose status as to fitness and good fellowship had hardly yet become established.

Dazey was new at the academy—new in experience, and essentially so in his originality.



He was a specimen of the spry, restive, fire-cracker kind that cause a noise in the world wherever they go.

He made no bones of it that he had been born in the Bowery, New York City, and that the influence of his uncle—a typical politician—had given him this “boost into the main top.”

Refreshing as the first field flower of spring, Dazey had swept down on the cadet field.

They took all his grandness away from him the first twenty-four hours of his arrival.

They could not, however, curb the snappiness that blurted out, novel and stimulating, at all hours of the day and night.

Gradually the loud tie, the spike-tail coat, the gorgeous display of jewelry disappeared.

Still, Dazey remained full as ever of sarcastic fire and harmless but cutting whiplash witticisms.

They had counted on having lots of fun with him, as they did with every new arrival.

The first guying break of Chawncey De Lawncey, however, was effectually silenced.

That Anglomaniac exquisite of the academy was quietly informed that “he had long eyebrows, and looked so good to mother!”

Even Nanny took a back seat, when Dazey replied to a spurt of spirit that “he would have water on the brain and get his hair drowned,” if he was not careful.

Sandy McPatrick, who delivered a joke as weightily and clumsily as if he was chopping cord wood, lugged in a fine sarcasm to be squelched by the serious promise that “if he got too personal, he would be put in the feathers with a bunch of the jawache!”

Clif liked the new plebe from the start, although he was independent, fiery, “careless of his statements.”

Clif had observed him take the part of an undersized



plebe at the academy, and tramp two miles in Annapolis to find a ragged hobo to give his civilian clothes to.

He, therefore, detected the genuine "diamond in the rough," and was ready fully to proffer "the glad hand."

Dazey had been somewhat reticent all along, and even now, despite Clif's frank and friendly hail, he advanced with a certain watchful leeriness of manner and eye as though fearful of a trap or sell.

The cadet leader was entirely serious. The observing cadets traced this. Dazey, as he got nearer, read Clif's earnestness clearly, and looked a trifle wondering.

Then all necks were craned. In a tone so low that they could not catch an echoing syllable, Clif had spoken a rapid, effective sentence to the new plebe.

Dazey started, drew back, stared hard at Clif.

"Say that again!" he directed.

Clif whispered in his ear once more.

"Is that right, or is it Sunday paper talk?" inquired the new plebe.

Clif murmured something additional, and Dazey's eyes began to resemble a couple of poached eggs.

"Then you're whipsawed to a finish!" he vociferated.

"He's getting excited!" observed watchful Nanny.

"Wonder what about?" muttered Pun'kin, in suspense.

"And the smokeless powder game is beaten to a pulp, and no getting away from it!" continued Dazey, and he looked both nervous and startled.

Just then a sharp sound beat the air from the direction of the rifle pits.

The vibration ran the rounds of the curious cadets like an electric shock.

"Do you hear him!" they heard Clif say, audibly this time.

"I hear him!" nodded Dazey, and his lips set with a peculiar speck of white about their corners.



Clif drew a whistle from his pocket and tendered it to him.

"And hollering plenty!" exclaimed Dazey. "All-right, I'll do just what you say."

He bolted with a glide up the rise, over the rise.

Clif tried not to look conscious as he came back to his companions, but all eyes were fixed inquisitively upon him.

"Hollering plenty" had struck their owners quite as forcibly as the new plebe.

A gruff, mature voice had shouted out disjointedly from the direction of the rifle pits.

Then came a brittle smash, another roar, and then—

Toot—tootle—toot—Clif's whistle, sharp and mandatory.

By this time Clif's cohorts were worked up to a state of mind fairly frenzied.

"Slip the traces, Clif!" growled impatient Fishcake, ready to lope like a retriever held in leash sniffing excitement in the air.

"Double-quick!" came the order.

Discipline suffered in the swift sweep of the expectant twelve.

"Ah!" came emphatic and prolonged from Fishcake's lips as they crossed the rise.

"Don't come!" cried a sharp voice.

Flaring out both hands in a wild way, the whistle held in one of them, Dazey obstructed the dash of the cadets.

Clif halted, and the others followed suit, all staring at a little building some thirty yards distant.

It was the shelter shed for the four heavy guns used at target drill.

It had four apertures, coming clear to the floor.

Guarding these and filling them were the cannons in question.



Over the muzzle of one there jauntily rested a rather battered up "plug" hat.

Stuck in the muzzle of another was a bottle.

Visible beyond, and hovering about the field pieces, was a plush-faced, bald-headed man of about sixty.

Maniac or inebriate, fired with the fenzy or full of the folly of recklessness, he was bustling about the interior as though he fancied himself the commander of a ship gettin gready to repel boarders.

"What is it?" pulsated Nanny.

"Who is it?" put in Pun'kin.

"Gov-booze," pronounced Dazey, bluntly.

"You mean, you know?" insinuated Chawncey de Lawncey.

Clif gave the blunderer a look, and Fishcake bestowed a nudge upon him.

"Why! it's plain, isn't it?" demanded Dazey. "Unk came down with me—must have met some friends. There he is—here we are. I give him up, Faraday—here's your whistle."

Dazey tried to treat the incident in his usual brusque, inconsequential way.

It was an effort, however, for his cheeks had grown colorless, and a sort of savage humiliation filled his eyes.

The majority of the crowd understood the situation. Clif had discovered the man in the gun shed.

He feared harm or mischief, and had hurried for his friends to remove or dislodge the inebriate.

Then, seeing Dazey, he had revealed the situation, asked him to get his relative away quietly or signal their aid, if necessary.

Dazey had found it necessary, it seemed, for he had blown the whistle.

Now, in a mortified way, he moved past one of the



sheet iron target guards, as if disgusted with the entire affair and bent on returning to the academy.

"Wait a moment," began Clif.

An interruption came. It was so vivid and forcible that nearly every member of the coterie made a dive behind the metal screen.

The man inside the gun shed had purposely or accidentally manipulated the firing apparatus of one of the pieces of ordnance.

Bang!

A terrific explosion brayed out, shrill and echoing.

Crash!

The air was filled with flying fragments of wood and glass.

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## CHAPTER II.

"MIXED!"

A fiendish yell of delight, mingled with the ringing detonations of the cannon.

"Having fun all by himself!" suggested Fishcake.

"There'll be damage next shot!" observed Dismal Joy.

That was the way that it looked. All of the pieces were loaded except the one just fired.

The ball from this and the bottle stuck in the muzzle had struck a small portable sentry house, shivering it to kindling wood.

"Get under cover!" ordered Clif to those of his contingent who had not directly availed themselves of the shelter of the target shield.

Then he alone unprotected, Clif waved his hand towards the besieged inebriate.

"Hey, there!" challenged Clif. "Mr.—what is his name?"



"Same as mine," confessed Dazey, a deep spot of shame filling either cheek.

"Do you hear me, Mr. Dazey?" sang out Clif.

"You young roustabouts!" roared the occupant of the gun shed—"trying to murder me?"

"Look here—"

"Firing on unprotected 'Merican citizen!"

"You fired."

"Didn't!"

"We wish to say—"

"But I will, if you don't scoot—get out—vamosay!"

Young Dazey reached out a quick hand. He dragged Clif behind the screen with the others.

His uncle, as he called him, was swinging himself about the circumscribed interior of the gun shed in a violent, reckless way.

Whatever mad idea possessed him, it was dangerous to get in range—all hands saw this.

Grabbing at wires, cords and levers in an ignorant, blundering manner, in an effort to put his threat into execution, he accidentally loosened a hinged window atop.

It dropped in, and they saw it hit his head and heard him yell his disapproval.

Subdued temporarily, he was lecturing himself, nursing his sore jaw, and getting the better rights of things.

Clif availed himself of this truce, this breathing spell, to interrogate Dazey.

He read at once the peculiar and mingled emotions of the new plebe.

Dazey was brusque, "everything went," he tried to be hard-headed as was he hard-fisted, but he had a certain true pride.

His relative was making a shocking show of himself, and he knew he would hear of it later.



"What's his idea?" insinuated Clif, gently.

"Mixed pickles—can't you see?" muttered Dazey.

"We must get him out of there."

"You wont!"

"Eh?"

"It's you with the silver handles if you try it!" announced Dazey.

"That's new!" approved Fishcake, with a grin.

"And pat!" chuckled Nanny.

"That's right!" vehemently enforced Dazey. "I tried to coax him. The talk he passed me! oh, it's a pure case of gazolium."

"Of what!" marvelled Trolley, the Jap.

"The broncho bazarus, the razmataz. Don't catch?"  
Some heads shook.

"Budge—booze, hard drinks. He's a wild terror in the Bowery with his herchmen—in that gun shed, imagining he's a whole navy—look out!"

"An excitable old gentleman feeling rather gay?" insinuated Chauncey.

"Put it so," assented Dazey. "He'll make it equatorial, I tell you—no numbers on the latitude when he gets started!"

"Dangerous?" questioned Pun'kin.

"Lumpy on the dead; no rag-time there—you wear crape and walk slow behind that unless you want to be damaged!"

There was new animation about the gun shed just here.

Clif felt that it was folly, culpable, to stand still staring.

A reckless inebriate had fired one gun—one of the other three commanded the wall of the academy grounds.

Destruction was sure to follow its explosion, perhaps a fatality.



"Let me handle affairs," said Clif, starting to leave cover.

"Get on your nursing clothes, if it's you and his whiskers!" suggested Dazey, ominously.

"Oh, I can reach him!"

"Not when he's this dotty—he's cute as a fox. I know him—you don't. He's simply awful when he starts the distillery racket, and he's started now. One of the regular old Bowery toots—smashing things and calling it grand. He's a surprise-server—sure!"

Clif was manifestly studying the situation.

"I think I can manage him," he insisted again.

"Never! tills he winds up of himself," declared Dazey. "He goes it hot and heavy for days when he's this way, never staying steam till he's he's right up against the allypozacks in the blue boxerinas."

Nanny staggered dazzled.

"What's them!" he asked, agape.

"Knock-out drops, hospital, see?" translated up-to-date Dazey. "He's got the microbe boys on the ropes bad!"

"You stay here," directed Clif to the group.

"Now, hold on!" deterred Dazey, grasping Clif's arm. "I don't want to see you die!"

"I'll not die—I am going to get at the old gentleman and quiet him down."

"Do you stand for it?"

"Sure thing! I imagine a little clever persuasion will fetch him."

"Not unless you hurry it into him when he's asleep!"

"Don't make a move," commanded Clif to his comrades. "When you see me over near the old stand, then set up a commotion and try and hold the attention this way."



"What's your programme, Clif?" interrogated Fishcake, a trifle anxiously.

"You will see—it will work."

Clif had his idea, and it seemed to involve strategy—a roundabout detour.

He got back beyond a fringe of bushes, and, the cadets divined, was working his way to a tactical position over near the stand he had referred to.

In its direction they kept their eyes goggling.

Then Nanny set up a shout, and the others followed chorusing.

They made out Clif lifting himself cautiously up onto the platform of the round stand which held spectators on show days.

"There he was!" declared Pun'kin.

"But where now?" interrogated Fishcake.

"I see him," breathed Nanny. "What's Clif doing that for, now?"

Clif was visible ever and anon—he was creeping the brief spiral staircase full length, so as not to be observed from the gun shed.

The structure ran up to a kind of an open dome.

Whatever Clif's plan—and it looked mysterious—the part of his comrades was to follow given directions.

They yelled lustily to attract the attention of the custodian of the gun-shed, to distract it from Clif.

No marked success greeted the effort, however. For two minutes the inmate had been droning in a way suggestive of speech to political heelers.

There was no let up, and if the shouts caught his notice he paid no especial attention to them.

He seemed simply to rest with confidence in his apparently impregnable position.

Fishcake stood chewing a straw nervously, his eyes



fixed with excitement and anxiety on the structure, in some part of which lurked Clif.

Suddenly a yell pierced the air. Impetuous Nanny voiced it, and peering beyond the iron screen the huddled cadets gaped and marvelled.

Tang!

From one of the top posts of the stand to the top of the gun shed ran a wire.

It slanted sharp and short, and ended where a great iron hook was driven into the roof tree of the shed.

This had sharply vibrated as against it, upon it, a swiftly-dizzying mass was projected.

"Clif!" gasped Nanny.

"It's him!" muttered Fishcake, and grimly.

Whiz!

"He's coming!"

"Licketty-switch!"

Clif was coming—but only as far as the gun shed.

They saw his purpose, and wondered what the outcome would be.

The wire was used for swinging out a flag and for practicing the life-line tactics.

It was taut and strong—no fear of it breaking.

The low roof window that the inmate of the gun shed had loosened still hung down and open.

"Great head!" voted Pun'kin, "strikes the terminus, drops, extracts the claws of the demon!"

This was evidently what Clif was after. They traced his progress.

Swish!

Hanging from the hook of the small wheel pulley used in the wire, Clif zipped along like a trolley car.

"Horrors!" blared Fishcake, with curdling abruptness.

"Mercy!"



"I say!"

A crash had come—immense, reverberating—the cannon.

Directly under Clif, from the gun pointed towards the stand, a blaze, a vast flurry of smoke belched out and up.

A moment it blotted Clif out. Then watching eyes steadied and hearts lifted—the nervy cadet leader and favorite was safe.

Not so much as grimed or shocked, he sped through the whirling cloud.

They saw him graze the roof, "arrive," let go the wire, drop, disappear.

"We can imagine the rest!" breathed Fishcake, with a tremendous gasp of relief.

It was easy to figure out results now.

Clif could handle most sober men—no matter how wiry or bulky.

One inebriated—no matter how tricky or wild—would be a mere plaything in his sturdy, adroit grasp, his admirers confidently decided.

Heads were bent in listening poses, eyes snapped expectantly, but no indication of excitement or commotion proceeded from the gun shed.

"Dropped on him?" guessed Nanny.

"Looks as if he, too, had gone to sleep," suggested Pun'kin.

"Catch him!" vociferated Fishcake. "Ah!"

Some one was awake in the gun shed.

The gun pointed towards the academy wall was the one festively decorated with the disordered plug hat.

A hand now reached out and removed this piece of headgear, drew it within the gun shed.

"Let's see what's going on in there," offered Chawncey De Lawncey.



"Oh! Clif will describe when the proper time comes," said Fishcake. "Suppose we obey orders!"

There was a five minutes' spell of silence and waiting. Finally one of the cannon was wheeled out from its resting place by a sturdy push.

This cleared the aperture presented, and into it immediately fitted an uncertain form.

From the silk hat jammed down over face and eyes, it was Dazey's uncle, the politician.

He had donned one of the long powder dusters, however, worn to protect natty cadet uniforms when target practice became hot and quick.

"Clif, the persuader!" crowed Nanny. He's prevailed on the old one to go home and behave himself.

"S-st!" warned Fishcake with a meaning glance at Dazey, whose face was white and working.

They held back as he prepared to pursue and catch up with the figure, which, starting from the gun shed, made some ridiculous attempts to imitate walking a chalkline.

"Ought to be taken home and have things done to him!" muttered Pun'kin.

The stray figure on the landscape was making a picturesque zigzag away from the cadet company.

Dazey caught up with it, seized its arm. Some words passed, and Dazey fell back.

Apparently his stubborn old relative had ordered him about his business.

"Meantime, what's come over Clif?" advanced Fishcake.

There was a diversion just here. Amid sundry mysterious winks and subdued whisperings, one after the other six of the cadet group melted from the scene.

That is, Nanny leading, the mischievous section, the "little fellows," separated themselves from the others.



They got into the shrubbery, and, sheltered by it, joined in a fluttering, animated council of war.

"Won't do, you know!" spoke Nanny.

"Oh, never!" grinned Pun'kin; "it's letting him off too easy."

"If Clif don't hail us."

"Get beyond hail, then!"

"Good idea. Keep shady, fellows!"

Nanny captained, and in single file the others trod in his tracks.

"There he is!" declared Pun'kin, as they ended a brief detour.

There was the bobbing silk tile and the wobbling duster-clad figure.

Dazey had retired from company and interference, and six pairs of eyes gloated.

"Left him to get away by himself," explained Pun'kin; "ought to be aroused to a sense of the seriousness of the occasion!"

"Rouse him!" suggested Nanny.

"Crack the whip!"

"Him in the centre!" ,

The apparently unconscious victim was finding life difficult, preserving an equilibrium headed down a slight slant.

The stealthy, sinister six swooped down upon him like wolves on a solitary lamb.

One to a side, hands locked as if by machinery, a whoop blazed out.

It would be rare fun to sober up the filled up politician with a vigorous run!

A roll, the bottom of the incline reached, would help; a dip into the trench beyond that would crown everything!

"Good and swift!" ordered Nanny.



"Yes, it'll be better than the allypozacks!" chuckled Pun kin.

"In the blue boxerinas!" crowed Trolley, the Jap, hugging himself with satisfaction.

There was a terrific rush, a tremendous plunge.

The whirling centre of a diving, reckless group, the silk hat and the streaming duster rose and fell like crest and ensign in a battle tumult.

"Fling!" bawled Nanny.

One end planted feet to "crack the whip."

The other curved to release the victim in the nick of time to let him slide through when momentum was simply a-whiz.

"Let go!" panted Pun'kin, breathless in his fatness.

"Drop him, I tell you!" vociferated Nanny.

"What's wrong?" flustered Trolley.

But somehow the trick did not work this time; perhaps the wearer of the silk hat and the long duster remembered schoolboy days himself.

He wouldn't let go, and he wouldn't be "slung."

With a loud whoop that was very tantalizing, he held fast to hands that had seized him.

He never let up, but ran them, willy-willy, on and down, then—

"Go!"

The victim had vanquished. With that word—dreadfully sober and matter-of-fact—and two deft flings, he sent the surging six "kiting."

Planting his feet as he braced back, he stopped himself dead short and sudden.

A whirling, helpless mass, the two wings he set adrift met.

They crashed together like tumbling sheep, recoiled, staggered, and, rolling over and over, went diving for the bottom of the slant.



## CHAPTER III.

## AN OMINOUS KEEPSAKE.

A scarecrow figure, prominent in silk hat and canvas duster attire, but statuesque, "the victim," stood planted where he had stopped.

"The rushers" writhed below all in a bunch, fists and feet flying.

"Take your heel out of my mouth!" came in a muffled tone from Pun'kin.

"Where's my ear?" plaintively inquired Nanny.

Trolley got up with his coat split from neck to waist.

Dismal Joy, finding his cap, was able to lift its top as if it was hinged like a patent stewpan.

Then, a grave, suspicious row, the righted six glared up at the mighty bunch of muscle that had upset their frolicsome plans, and, incidentally, themselves.

"Wonder what he is—sober!" growled Pun'kin.

"I'm always that!" proclaimed a clear, bracing tone.

"Hey!" glowered Nanny.

"Sold!" gulped Joy.

The silk hat was tossed off and the enveloping duster collar moved free from the speaker's face.

"You see," remarked Clif—for Clif it was—"I guessed what you would be up to."

"You guess everything!" muttered Nanny.

"You've had your fun, just the same."

"Yes, we have!" mumbled Joy, nursing a skinned elbow.

"He's played us shameful!" flared Nanny. "The real one is back in the gun shed—come on!"

"Yes, deadly vengeance!" hissed Pun'kin dramatically.



"He shan't escape us!" declared Trolley, with amateur fiendishness.

"You'll find him gone," smiled Clif tranquilly.

Clif rested his confidence in that surmise; he had fixed things so that there should be no break along the line.

When Clif had landed through the roof of the gun shed he had grazed a portly front that gave and shocked.

They called the popular cadet "a persuader," and he dazzled Dazey's uncle with the briskness of his arrival and the promptness with which he forced him to understand things.

Clif convinced the old man that nothing would give the cadets greater pleasure than to have him deliver a speech to them that evening.

He flattered the politician into believing he would not forget the appointment, then hinted delicately at his condition, and suggested a brief retirement from public gaze.

Clif had the untamed tiger of the Bowery docile and placid within five minutes' time.

The latter rather fancied himself cute in helping to fool the crowd outside.

So Clif had disguised himself, and when Dazey hurried after him a word explained, and the new plebe hustled back to get his uncle out of the way.

The new plebe came upon the present scene just as Nanny and the others retired crestfallen from it.

Dazey looked flustered, but relief and satisfaction showed in manner and face.

He came straight up to Clif and shot out a straight, forcible hand.

"Faraday," he said, simply, "you're a good sort!"

"They're all fairly that, pretty much, hereabouts," smiled Clif lightly.

"I won't forget!" declared Dazey, bound to be serious.

"Better."



"Eh?"

"And I'll make the rest of them do the same thing. We all have our capers."

"Capers!" fired up Dazey; "glad uncle's don't grow the size of rabbits!"

"Did you have any trouble with him?"

"No—his mind is on political economy, and the speech he's invited to make at the academy to-night. Don't fret! he won't put in an appearance."

"If he does, we'll treat him right," said Clif.

"He won't. He'll strike town, where he's headed for, and be in the feathers before night, a living drug store, with seven kinds of dope shot into him! I'm sorry and sheepish over this rantangle, I tell you!"

"Needn't burden your mind," assured Clif; "it will drift by, forgotten, like other trifling peccadilloes."

"You get past me with those long boys, Faraday," intimated Dazey.

"Do I? Call it lark, then."

"Oh! the high-stepper is right enough. I'll get on as I educate. All I've got to do when you give me such words is to think of Germans. All the same, any guy that can spring such and make good, mind you, is entitled to his little merit mark."

Clif smiled. Dazey's audacious handling of the English language was bracing as a cordial draught.

"Whole bunches of sunshine in this fellow if you know how to take him," mused Clif. "Eh! Now, what?"

Clif had progressed a step or two, intent on a return to his fellow cadets and the academy.

Dazey, however, had got in his way, purposely to stop him.

"A minute 'll do," he observed in his usual terse manner.

"For what?" wondered Clif.



Dazey's hand went into both pockets, then up to his scarf.

"They strip you of all gewgaws here!" he lamented, "But this 'll fill in."

From under one coat lapel Dazey unpinned some kind of an ornament and advanced upon Clif with manifest interest.

The cadet leader put out a deterring hand.

"Now, what are you up to, Dazey?" he demanded.

"Wear this."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes! I'm cottoning to you fast, Faraday, and I'm headstrong, see? Wish it was a sparkler!"

"But——"

"Our way on the Bowery! Uncivilized? You'll tame me down here finally. Let me think you ain't quite asnamed to think I like you."

Clif did not have the heart to repress Dazey's streak of prodigal generosity.

"All I've got with me. Just a keepsake," proceeded Dazey. "Governor's got scads, oodles of them, though. There—nobby!"

"Unique," commented Clif, bending the pin his companion had adjusted to his coat so as to inspect it.

"Yes, quite wham—and freaky," nodded Dazey.

The ornament was a stoutly made skull head of gold, large as a finger nail.

Set back in its gaping mouth was a fiery, sparkling ruby.

An intricate monogram crested the forehead in three different shades of metal.

"Unk gaye it to me," lightly represented Dazey. "It was a memento from some of his constituents."

"Political?"

"Just that—down in the Greek settlement. He helped



them, through the police, run down a murderer of a countryman, and they retorted with this. I remember the pow-wow when they brought it. With all their jabbering, you'd have thought they were making him a king or the head of a ku-klux, at the least!"

"Perhaps they were," suggested Clif; "so don't give it away. Take it back."

"Couldn't think of it."

Dazey had certainly "cottoned" to Clif. He did not make himself effusively prominent, but up to 3 o'clock that afternoon he seemed to take genuine pleasure in throwing himself in the sterling cadet's way several times.

"He's all right!" observed Fishcake to Clif, Vic Rollins and Ridgely, as they sat in his room close after the tap of the leisure hour. "From the wilds, such is life in a great city, and all that! but trainable."

"He's sharp enough," nodded Ridgely, "and he's shrewdly making Clif a model—watching, studying."

"That speaks well for him!" declared Vic.

"All hands!" burst in Nanny upon the group.

"Give it a name," suggested Fishcake.

"City."

"Fire in Annapolis?"

"Better fun!"

"What?"

"An auction. The mob is going to guy the auctioneer and maybe pick up a prize," explained Nanny.

"If they were selling brains, now—" insinuated Fishcake.

"They are selling a lot of unclaimed freight," said Nanny, "and one fellow got a whole library for a dollar, last year."

"Too close after pay day for me," crunched Fishcake.

"The fun don't cost," argued Nanny.

"All right, pilot," agreed Clif, and an acquiescent nod



went the rounds. "Won't you take a stroll, Dazey?" Clif queried kindly as they passed the new plebe out in the hall.

"Don't care if I do," Dazey said, brightening up.

The auction was in progress in an express shed near the depot.

A yearly event, it brought together a good many people, but the cadets had a way of always getting "a front seat."

The crowd, knowing their pressing tactics, avoided a hustle, and the auctioneer rapped his hammer fiercely on recognizing their uniforms.

"His voice sounds as if an ice wagon had run over it two or three times!" suggested Dazey, as the gruff, cracked "going! going! gone!" accompanied the dispatching of several old trampish trunks.

There was a hooked-nosed speculator the cadet crowd insisted on dubbing "Warm Gravy," and a thin, cadaverous bidder they designated as "Stale Bread."

The general crowd enjoyed the zest of excitement the tormenting jokes of the cadets gave to the occasion. They soon had the rival bidders fairly wild with suggestions, but it lent briskness to the sale, and the auctioneer did not call them down.

Clif was amused and interested. The leisure hour was passing pleasantly enough.

"Lot 7231!" sang out the clerk, and a small, plain satchel was banged down on the auctioneer's desk.

"What am I bid for it?" cried the latter, impatiently, for the storage-battered object presented no especial suggestion of value.

"Five cents" said Nanny.

"Five dollars!" spoke up a new voice.

"Ah!" purred the hook-nosed man, with a start.

"Aha!" echoed his twinkling-eyed fellow speculator, waking up all over.



Clif slowly surveyed the three antagonists who had evidently shied their castors into the ring for a brisk battle.

At that moment there came a tug at his arm.

Clif was seated on a heap of boxes. Leaning upon them behind him, Dazey had kept near to him since the sale commenced.

It was Dazey who had sought to attract his attention.

"Lean back, Faraday!" he half whispered.

"What for?"

"I want to say something to you."

"All right?"

"I think you're one of my kind."

Clif looked a little mystified.

"My kind is to hate a sneak and a thief like poison!" went on Dazey, and Clif wondered what was stirring him up so, for he talked fairly fierce.

"Mine, too," nodded Clif, "but—"

"Fix your eyes on the fellow who just bid five dollars for that old satchel!"

"Yes?" said Clif, vaguely, and did so, and wondered what it could be that the new plebe was driving at.

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## CHAPTER IV.

"GOING! GOING! GONE!"

"A sneak and a thief" certainly looked the person to whom Dazey had directed Clif's attention.

The naval cadet was a keen observer and judge of human nature.

The man who had bid five dollars on the old satchel probably looked simply commonplace to Fishcake, Nanny or Pun'kin, but Clif possessed the advantage of having had his attention especially attracted toward him.

He scanned the furtive-faced, sinister-eyed fellow with keen scrutiny.



Then Clif turned again to Dazey.

"I entirely agree with you," he said.

"I knew you would."

"That is, if looks go for anything."

"They do with him—he looks just what he is."

"Not knowing the man, however—"

"You don't miss anything!" interrupted the new plebe.

"I know him!"

"Is he from New York City?"

"Yes, he was mixed up in some pretty hazy deals there—always crooked."

"You don't seem to like him," suggested Clif.

Clif said this because Dazey was looking so very moved and incensed at the sight of the fellow.

"No, I don't!" admitted Dazey bluntly.

"Has he ever bothered you?"

"Bad enough!"

"How?"

"That's family history," almost snapped Dazey, and Clif decided that he was having a good deal of bother with his "family." "See here, Faraday, do me a favor?"

"Why, certainly," nodded Clif, but in wonder.

"It's not like me to spread a fellow for the coin I hardly know."

"What are you getting at?"

"I am interested in that man—Treyser."

"Is that his name? I see you are."

"I never dreamed of meeting him here, this way, and it hits me at a bad time."

"How?"

"I have no money with me."

"Do you need some?"

"I do, and if you are fixed—"

Clif ran his hand into his pocket and calculated.

"I have twenty dollars about me," he said.



"I guess that's enough."

"It's yours."

"No! no!" demurred Dazey, as Clif extended a little roll of banknotes. "You don't understand me."

"I must confess that I don't!" tersely acknowledged Clif.

"Well, I want to borrow it, but I don't want it myself. Quick, Faraday! don't let him get it."

"Get what?"

"That satchel!"

"Ah, I understand!" nodded Clif, fancying that he did understand that the new plebe's interest was quite as much centered on the satchel as in the man.

"Going!" sang out the auctioneer just here, hammer suspended.

"Hold on!" interrupted Clif, who had missed some of the bidding—"How much?"

"Eight dollars."

"Nine!"

The minute Clif said this two things happened that he noticed and stored up.

The man Dazey had designated as Treyser gave him a freezing stare.

Dazey himself drew back in the shadow of the boxes so that he could not possibly be seen.

The two habitual auction room speculators looked anxious, curious and uncertain.

"Ten!" announced Treyser.

"Eleven," said Clif, steadily.

"Twelve!"

"Thirteen!" said Clif.

"Fourteen!" growled Treyser, and spoke it from a gruff, harsh throat.

"Fifteen!" pronounced Clif, softly.

The room was hushed through intense interest.



"Crazy?" nudged the marvelling Fishcake.

"Don't give in at any risk, at any amount!" floated a rapid whisper on Clif's ear. "I'll pay back at once. Borrow, credit, anything, only get that satchel!"

"Do you know what is in it?" Clif cautiously breathed back.

"I don't," came the brief reply.

"Then—"

"It's enough to know that Treyser is interested in it. I'll explain later; it's all right!"

"Ah!"

Treyser's brow was deep drawn, his thin, cruel lips savagely set.

"What do you want it for?" he glowered at Clif.

"What do you?"

Treyser hunched his shoulders irritably. Clif could hear him running over coins with his fingers in his pocket.

He traced from the man's anxiety that he was probably reaching the limit of his ready means.

"Sixteen!" he said, but falteringly, dubiously.

"Seventeen!"

Clif knew that he had won the day—but by a narrow margin.

Treyser looked flustered and desperate. He leaned toward the auctioneer. The latter shook his head.

Treyser had probably asked for time, credit.

"Can't break rules," vouchsafed the auctioneer. "Going!"

Treyser gnawed his tawny mustache angrily.

"Going!"

Clif drew out his money.

"Gone! to—"

"Faraday."



Treyser gave his head a vicious jerk. His teeth clicked, and he wriggled back into the crowd and out of sight.

"Dazey!" spoke Clif, leaning back into the gloom beyond the boxes he was sitting on.

There was no response. The queer new plebe had vanished, and why and wherefore?

Clif went up to the desk and paid out his seventeen dollars. The clerk swung him down the satchel with a grinning face.

"Gold!" he winked, and the roomful laughed, for it was easy to see that the bag was light.

"Going travelling!" leered Fishcake.

"You haven't even got a cat in a bag!" derided Pun'kin, grabbing the satchel, and its side certainly gave limp and hollow against apparent nothingness.

"Never you mind!" directed Clif. "Try your own luck."

"Luck! Open up and show yours!"

"Oh, I'm in no hurry!" evaded Clif.

Vic gave his roommate and fellow cadet a shrewd glance, trying to probe his motives.

Vic knew that practical, far-sighted Clif Faraday was not given to wildcat speculations, but Clif's face remained sphynx-like.

Then, while his comrades were absorbed in some brisk banter over a feminine hat box just put up for sale, Clif stepped behind the sheltering rows of freight.

He took a look and a scurry for Dazey, but Dazey was not visible.

"I can't make this out. What did he leave for?" Clif questioned himself.

Always finding a ready answer after groping, Clif hit on two explanations. Dazey had either left to keep track of the man Treyser, or had hurried away to get money to meet a possible bid beyond Clif's stated means.



Clif got into the open air and looked up street, down street, but saw no sign of either Dazey or Treyser.

"The fellows will bother me to death about this satchel if I let them see it again," he ruminated. "They are quite up to burglarizing it, too, unless I explain, and I don't want to do that."

Clif decided to return to the academy, stow the satchel safely, and wait for Dazey's arrival there.

Should the latter return to the auction room the others would explain that Clif bid in the satchel, and he would understand.

Clif had proceeded three blocks, casually wondering what lay under the surface of the unusual episode of the hour, what the satchel might contain, when hurried footsteps coming up behind caused him to turn.

He recognized the person approaching—Treyser. He was bland as butter now, but the forced smile did not conceal his eagerness, annoyance, a certain desperate glitter of the eye.

"Excuse me," spoke Treyser, briskly, "but I followed you."

"I see you have," answered Clif, calmly, and getting a good grip on the satchel.

"Nearly missed you—waited for you to come out the other way."

"Ah! indeed?"

"Of course about that satchel. Your interest in it."

"I have no interest in it," interrupted Clif, bluntly.

"No? Then, why did you buy it? It's a losing investment."

"Won't pay me, eh?" insinuated Clif.

"I should say not!"

"You seem to be sure?"

"Because I know."

"A well informed man!"



"Scarcely—seeing that it's my property."

This phase of it struck Clif with both wonder and curiosity.

"Is that so?" murmured the cadet.

"Yes, it's so!" retorted Treyser, excitedly and persuasively. "You don't believe it? My name is Treyser. Look at the bottom of the bag."

"Quite correct," nodded Clif, carelessly inspecting.

"There's an initial 'T,' but it may stand for anything."

"It stands for Treyser," insisted the man. "Here is another proof."

He produced a key.

"See if that don't fit."

Clif tried it.

"It fits," he acknowledged, half-slipping the lock.

"I'll explain to you," continued Treyser, speciously.

"I lost that satchel some months ago—or, rather, I was so circumstanced that I could not claim it."

"And it was sold for charges?"

"I got wind of that. The only way to secure it was to bid it in. You happened to have more money than I did and made a very foolish investment."

"Well, I'll pocket my loss," pronounced Clif, steadily.

Treyser looked staggered, disappointed, ugly.

"You won't turn it over?" he demanded.

"Certainly not."

"I'll raise the seventeen dollars?"

"No—I'd rather keep it."

"I'll make it twenty?"

"Not then, either."

Treyser turned a good many different shades of color in a very few seconds.

"You're not treating me right!" he finally declared in a complaining tone of voice.

"That is a matter of opinion."



"You are a stranger to me—you cannot possibly have any interest in my affairs? There is nothing in the satchel but a few old papers and some worthless clothing."

Clif said nothing.

"I'll tell you what I'll do: The initial and the key tally to my claim?"

"Presumably."

"Take me some place, open the satchel—you have the key. I will verify, article by article, in it. You can examine the papers, everything. If you find one line, one article, that could possibly have reference to anything but the most commonplace interest of my own—lug it away again."

The naval cadet reflected for a moment, studied the man's face, recalled all that Dazey had said to him. Then he formed a hasty decision.

"Done!" said Clif.

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## CHAPTER V.

### AMONG THE PITFALLS.

The proposition made by the man Treyser seemed to Clif to be eminently fair.

There were two sides to every question, and a certain justice in his representations, Clif conceded.

"I'll do just that," acceded Clif.

"Thanks," nodded Treyser.

"Where shall we go?"

"Where you like. Some hotel, restaurant. Hold on—do you mind coming to my quarters?"

That precisely suited Clif. To locate this man's place of abode might be a point to Dazey later on.

"Is it near?" he insinuated.

"Only a few squares away."



"Go ahead—that's all right and reasonable," nodded Clif.

The naval cadet maintained a strong grip on the handles of the satchel.

Treyser had allowed him to retain possession of its key. Clif kept a watch on his every move, however.

There was a sinister side gleam to Treyser's eye, and he uneasily scanned the street back of him ever and anon, as though used to being followed or fearing it just now.

"Not a very choice locality!" remarked Treyser, as they turned into a street that did not belie his claim.

"I see that," nodded Clif.

"Perhaps you would rather go to some hotel?"

"Keep right on," said Clif.

Into the side entrance to a building, the lower front half of which was a saloon, Treyser turned.

"Come up?" he invited.

"Certainly. You seem to think I am afraid of something?" suggested Clif.

"Not at all—but I am a gentleman!" bluffed Treyser.

"I see!"

"Not used to inviting other gentlemen to a place adopted from necessity, and not preference."

The stairway grew darker the higher up they went. Then at the end of a long, unlighted entry, Treyser paused and fumbled at a door.

As he opened it he stood aside for Clif to enter, and the naval cadet stepped over its threshold.

Just then some one passing along the hall spoke. Treyser answered.

"Excuse me for a moment," he said to Clif, and took a few steps down the hall.

A greeting ended in a hurried whispering. Then Treyser glided back to his side.



"Giving some directions to the man who attends to the room," he explained. "I'm staying here temporarily."

Clif wondered where he slept, for there was neither bed nor couch in the apartment into which he led him.

At the side were several chairs—in the middle a bare, coverless table.

There was neither carpet nor matting on the floor. Treyser locked the door on the inside.

"Set down the satchel," he insisted, indicating the table.

Clif did this, but remained standing a foot away from it, facing his host.

Then he felt that no treachery was intended, for Treyser proceeded to a chair in the farther corner of the room.

"Just a word," he said, "and then you can unlock and verify."

"Go ahead?" nodded Clif.

"Why are you so interested in this matter?"

"Don't let us discuss that," observed Clif. "We came here to follow out a certain plan agreed on."

"We did—that is true, we did," admitted Treyser, slowly.

He seemed nervous, for one hand the while had hung by his side, and it fumbled about the baseboard—idly, aimlessly, it looked.

"So—I'll open," said Clif.

"That's it," agreed Treyser.

A queer, baffling smile—very sudden, very sinister—played across his face.

"I am at liberty to scrutinize its contents?"

"At your leisure."

"All right, eh!"

Clif understood that smile now. He had turned to proceed with the inspection in question.

The satchel was gone!

Not only was the satchel gone, but the table as well.



Where it had stood a three-foot square section of the floor was just settling back into place.

"A trick!" shouted Clif.

"Just so!" answered Treyser.

He had arisen to defend himself, for Clif's stern, flushed face was a certain menace.

Clif in a flash realized what had been done.

A tricky man, Treyser had chosen tricky quarters for a domicile.

Whatever this den might be, it was provided with accessories for causing the disappearance of animate or inanimate objects at a moment's notice.

Some apparatus at the side of the chair into which Treyser had sank operated the trap on which the table had stood.

Noiselessly this had descended.

Some one below—possibly the man Treyser had met in the hall—posted, had removed the table.

Then noiselessly again the trap was slid back into place, possibly moving on slow, heavy springs.

Clif did not heed the man—he dropped to the side of the trap.

With both hands he sought to get a clutch on the board edges just closing, aiming to stay their progress.

"Aha!" jeered Treyser.

Clif was caught.

His finger ends were wedged in by the almost closing trap, and there he stooped, struggling.

Treyser ran up to him. He grabbed him by the back of his coat.

"Cadet—I believe they call you Faraday—you have meddled with edge tools!"

"Have I?" flustered Clif.

"To your undoing! You broke in with none of my inviting."



"Release me—my fingers are crushing!" painfully panted Clif.

"You won't break out so readily!"

Clif gave a tug, almost superhuman. His finger tips seemed ripping off.

He tore free. His captor slung him upright, gave him a violent push.

"I can tell who put you on to me!" he hissed.

"Tell!" flared Clif, striving to get free of that twisting, back-handed clutch.

"Dazey!"

"Is it so?"

"What did he tell you?"

"Find out!"

"I will—before you hear taps again!"

"There for you!"

Clif managed to deal sideways a hard-fisted rap.

"There for you!" shouted Treyser back, mad with the stinging contact of the echoing cheek blow.

He had given Clif a shove and he kept him on the run.

It was toward an interior door, and as he reached it he waited not to manipulate lock or catch.

It flew open, and he dashed Clif through the opening, letting go of him once headed over its threshold.

As for himself, he slipped quickly back, and hovering there, stared expectantly on his whirling victim.

Clif stumbled a few feet, and then perforce went flat.

It was in the centre of a room, and in the centre of a large rug almost covering its floor.

The cadet was dizzied, confused, by the painful, rapid incidents of the past few minutes.

Seeing, too, that Treyser did not pursue, Clif took a breathing spell, sitting down.

"It was Dazey!" shouted in Treyser.



"Was it?" pronounced Clif.

"Will you tell?"

"Why—don't you know?"

"I'll not fool with you!" threatened Treyser, angrily.

"Come in. I'm ready for you!" dared Clif, springing to his feet.

"Yes, and you stay in!"

Immediately Clif went toppling again.

Something jarred as Treyser's hand struck the side of the doorway, the threshold of which he had so cautiously refrained from passing.

In each corner of the room an iron bar ran up from floor to ceiling.

Clif had scarcely noted these. Had he done so he would casually have voted them gas or water pipes.

Now he guessed for them a more sinister utility, however.

This was trick room number two, and he was the victim this time instead of the table.

Only, whereas the table went down, Clif, after being thrown flat violently, went up.

The corners of the rug, attached in some way to the corner rods, and operated by some strong cable running beside them, gathered up.

It lifted smoothly and rapidly as a hoisted awning.

And Clif Faraday was netted!

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SLAVE OF THE RING.

There was a wavy, rattling and clicking motion to the rug as it ascended.

"He is right!" breathed Clif. "I will not get out of here so readily as I got in!"

Clif felt himself in the deep swim of plot and peril now.



Treyser's allusion to Dazey showed that there was a recognized connection of affairs between both.

Treyser may not have been aware of Dazey's presence at the auction room, but he certainly knew he was in Annapolis, at the Naval Academy.

So, it was all for a friend—and a nervy one.

And Clif was not afraid but that when he was missed Dazey would be promptly, powerfully on the trail.

"The fix I'm in!" soliloquized Clif, as he came to a stop.

He was flat up against the top of the ceiling.

Clif felt it, rapped it lightly.

"Metal," he murmured.

Then he spread out, groped out.

There was a bulge, where he reposed in the middle of the rug.

Elsewhere it came tight to the ceiling. Clif slipped, slid along to one edge.

It was drawn up, caught in some deft way through slots in the ceiling, that from the floor had looked like a dark colored cornice.

There was no slack to force, to tear away. Clif was netted aloft.

"It's cut my way out and down, then," he said. "Mistake again—clever they are!"

Clif voted the devices of this secret den most artfully contrived and adapted.

He had managed to draw out his knife and deal a long slicing cut in the rug bottom.

It was heavily piled and it took some sawing to force the merest slit, and then Clif paused.

His knife struck something hard.

"A close-linked steel net woven in with the under strands," he discerned—"no thoroughfare out of here!"



Clif spread the slight slit he had made, and essayed to take a look into the room beneath.

It was untenanted. The door of the next apartment where the table had disappeared was still wide open, but no one lingered now at its threshold.

"Treyser—where is he, and what is he going to do next?" reflected Clif.

He soon knew. A moment later before his view plainly Treyser came into the room.

He brought a chair with him and he planted it near a window.

Sitting down, he glanced up at the queer net with a peculiarly satisfied expression on his sinister face.

Then he jerked a thumb derisively aloft as the open doorway was filled and a man entered.

This latter Clif at once adjudged was some willing tool or accomplice, and the man to whom Treyser had whispered in the hall.

He was also the final manipulator of trap and net apparatus, and he carried with him the satchel that had descended on the table.

Ah! got it?" nodded Treyser, eagerly seizing the bag.

Clif had its key in his pocket. Treyser looked up at the net half vaguely. Then he caught the two handles of the satchel and tugged hard.

With a snap the lock gave, and the satchel spread open.

Treyser's companion stood, curious, interested, watching all these manœuvres.

Treyser revealed a lot of old wearing apparel, which he tossed out with rude heedlessness.

He came finally to a wad of linen, uncreased it, and produced a folded paper.

"Got what you want?" insinuated his companion.

Treyser tapped the paper, aglow with pleasure supreme.



"Sure and fast!" he announced. "I arrived here in full time—and I nearly missed it."

"Through that one?" indicated the other, pointing aloft.

"No one else. You see, Dazey—"

"Aren't you talking pretty free?"

Treyser shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you suppose," he interrogated in a particularly cold-blooded way, "I'll ever let this venturesome cadet report at roll call again?"

"Is he—posted?"

"Would he throw away seventeen dollars on an old satchel if he wasn't? Leave him to me."

"Yes, I want no hand in anything concerning cadets!" muttered the man. "They're favorites hereabouts, and slick. Then you've got it?" he resumed, glancing at the folded paper.

"I've got it."

"How did you come to lose it?"

"I was headed for here nearly a year ago. They stopped me at Philadelphia."

"Oh!"

"My luggage went through."

"So?"

"They sent me in another direction."

"Where they bar people in?"

"Just that. It gave me time for reflection. Then I got out last month. I reckoned up my capital."

"Why was it?"

"One elopement!"

"The Dazey affair?"

"The politician's daughter. I fancied that a great spec when I dazzled her with stories of my big wealth and high social standing in California."

"Ah!"



Clif echoed the comment. He was "catching on."

He even forgot the ominousness of Treyser's recent allusion to himself in the quite eager interest of the moment.

Treyser was revealing what Dazey had called "family history," and Clif was seeking for the intimated connection.

"You know we left old Dazey's one evening and hurried to a minister?" narrated Treyser.

"You told me so."

"Coming from there, ten minutes spliced, we were met by the infuriated old terror."

"Who took his daughter away from you and threatened to shoot you like a dog if he ever saw you again?"

"Worse than that!" nodded Treyser, airily; "he's got a pull. He had found out all about me. He had the influence to jail me for life."

"So—"

"I let the girl slide. She was willing. The story of my career cured her. They wanted her to get a divorce. She had scruples. So the matter rested."

"I don't see where you are going to make a spec?"

"Don't? Well, when I got out of jail recently, I paid a visit to the Dazey home—on the quiet."

"Broke in, you mean?" bluntly translated Treyser's accomplice.

"You have it! I got a few dollars and a ring."

"The one you told me about?"

Treyser turned from under his palm the setting of a heavy circlet.

Clif, even at the distance he was and under the peering disadvantage that he suffered, made a discovery that startled him.

In a measure the ring was a prototype of the pin that



Dazey had given him that day, only it had no inscription on the skull's head.

"I soon found out its value," proceeded Treyser. "I soon found that man who is its slave."

"The fellow with you?"

"The same. Of course he swore by me at once. He knew the Dazeys. I used him as my messenger. An idea struck me. I sent a remarkable and fetching message to Miss Dazey."

"You mean your wife?"

"I don't."

"Why?"

"For we were never married."

"How?"

"Not at all, and that was why I took it so meekly. I offered to prove it to her."

"For a consideration?"

"A big one!"

"And she?"

"Would give her very life to know that we were never man and wife. This certificate, run down, proves that we are not."

"In what way?"

"Bogus clergyman."

"I see!"

"Which I can put her in the way of finding out."

"Good, again!"

"To wind up: she is to meet me at a place convenient to here, and hand over to me a lump of jewelry and a wad of money that would make your mouth water."

"And old Dazey—"

"Cat and kitten, old Dazey and young Dazey, are both away from home, and she has just taken the key of the family safe into her own hands, thinking they will sanc-



tion everything when she tells them after it's all over. Good play?"

"Capital! And then you send her back—"

"Do I!" exclaimed Treyser. "Not a bit of it! I get her in my hands—I keep her in my hands, and if Dazey don't want me really to marry her, he puts up as much more as she brings."

"Treyser, you're playing big!"

"And I intend to win."

"And he will—the precious scoundrel! the conscienceless schemer! if I don't get away from here!" breathed Clif, hotly.

Here was a plot truly worthy of "the thief and sneak" Dazey had described Treyser to be.

If Clif did not get away! The next moment Clif knew that it was not on the cards that he should ever get away.

For Treyser's accomplice pointed up to the ceiling and said significantly:

"Him?"

"Below," answered Treyser, simply.

"And then?"

Treyser turned the ring around again.

"Send him," he spoke, touching its skull-head setting.

"All right."

The man went away. When he came back five minutes later he was followed by a tawny-skinned man, who trod as lightly as if velvet shod.

Treyser drew a card from his pocket. Clif could only make out that it contained some foreign letters in rotation—an alphabet, he decided.

Under each letter was a second penciled one, evidently corresponding in English.

To one, to another, to a dozen, a hundred, rapidly spelling out some direction, Treyser pointed



When he was through he turned around the ring seal once again.

The foreigner—for his face, actions and build proclaimed him fully to be such—pointed up at the net.

Then his hands ran along his belt under a loose kind of a girdle he wore, as if seeking for a knife.

Then he crossed his breast twice in succession, bowed low and kissed the ring on Treyser's finger.

Clif Faraday thrilled.

It was not difficult to read between the lines:

This man, this "slave of the ring," had just been appointed his executioner!

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## CHAPTER VII

### AN HOUR OF DREAD.

"Dumb!" pronounced Clif Faraday, under his breath.

"And deaf!" he supplemented a moment later.

The words of the naval cadet referred to the man who had kissed the strange ring on Treyser's finger.

Clif was no longer in the net, but he was quite as helpless now as when the metal-faced surface of the rug held him tightly to the ceiling.

For an hour after Treyser's cool and blood-thirsty decision Clif had been left aloft.

He had a grim, tireless watcher, however—the swarthy foreigner.

Squatted in the darkest corner of the room, this individual—with a sinister stare that made Clif shudder every time he caught its fixed glitter—never dropped his eye from the nest encasing the netted victim above.

Later, the man who had brought the satchel entered the room once more.

The rug was lowered, but only after the door had been secured.

Clif, knife-armed, attempted a defense.

The sinuous hands of one determined captor, the great mauling fists of the other, subdued him, sturdy and stout as the cadet was.

Then Clif was bound, carried down two flights of stairs,



and now, after the lapse of still another hour, he lay upon an old mattress, awaiting his doom.

It hovered, it surely would not pass him by—for he was alone with the foreigner.

For a few minutes Treyser and his accomplice had visited the place.

Clif had made no appeal to the sanguinary Treyser—he knew it would be fruitless.

The more so as he had overheard him intimate to his companion how, his hands imbued in human blood, the foreigner would be more loyal to them than ever.

Clif gathered further that the man did not understand a single word of English—that probably Treyser alone of all in that house could converse with him by means of the double alphabet screed.

Treyser was going away at once. He was to send word to his accomplice in a day or two how his plans succeeded.

They were to join him when he got affairs in safe shape, as he expressed it.

Then, with a last finger-pointed message to the foreigner, the two withdrew, and now Clif lay watching the former, shut with him into that grim stone-walled cellar room.

His captor seemed to be working himself up into a transport of emotion.

The ring with which Treyser controlled him was evidently the signet of some mystic order to which he was allied with the devotion of a fanatic.

The fellow would halt and glare at Clif with elfish, ravenous eyes.

His frame would convulse and twist, and a low mutter resembling nothing human would emanate from his harsh, hot throat.

It was like being shut in helpless with a hungry tiger whetting its appetite with a sight of its sure victim.

When the man finally drew out a queer creese-like knife and spun it upon one hardened palm and brandished it ferociously, Clif made up his mind that his remaining moments of life were few indeed.

"He's coming!" panted Clif, and set his lips tightly.

The man had gone clear to the other end of the room.



Posed like a crack runner awaiting the starting word, he suddenly bounded forward.

He fairly skimmed the floor, and Clif anticipated the halt, the dive, the burying of the steel in his quivering breast.

Not so—the man swayed only in a circular tour of the cellar as he passed Clif.

It was to dazzle his victim's eyes with the glint of his weapon, to almost touch, yet just graze, his shrinking face.

"He's coming!" repeated Clif—but it was a second fake alarm.

The third wild curve of the sprinting form carried him on a certain bend that was significant.

This time he dropped to Clif's side—his eyes resembled blazing sapphires.

A voiceless but curdling expression rattled in his throat.

The knife took a whirl and a whiz in the air, cutting it like a convulsing snake.

"Now!" breathed Clif.

He did not close his eyes, but his heart thumped mightily—there was something sickening in being at the mercy of this wordless fanatic.

"Not now!" corrected Clif, with a quick catch in his breath.

"And why not?"

Why, indeed?

The foreigner was acting strangely. He had paused in the terrifying by-play of that deftly-handled knife, as if his arm were paralyzed.

His thin jaw drooped and his hair seemed to bristle.

Savage fury in the sanguinary eyes died down to a startled expression that Clif could not analyze.

The man began to shrink—he seemed to draw within himself.

His lips parted and shook, his breath came in audible gasps of fright, of fear, of seeming awe.

A horrible gurgle rattled in his throat—he seized the knife in both hands, his fingers at tip and haft.

One snap and it broke like a brittle icicle.

Upon the hard cement floor the two fragments were



cast—as if their touch were poison, and the man shuddered.

Then, rigid as a statue, he arose, folded his arms on his breast, bowed his head, and acted like a person awaiting, expecting a doom deserved.

"What's up?"

Clif voiced the homely query, aloud and irrepressibly.

The fanatic began to shake, his knees bent under him, he drooped lower, lower.

"He's untying me!" panted the astounded Clif.

The bonds fell free.

"He's lifting me up!"

So the trembling fingers were at work. Then, crouching, humble, suppliant, the foreigner struck his face violently flat upon the hard concrete cellar floor.

He groped blindly with one hand, sought and found Clif's foot, and set it directly across his neck.

Clif was pretty well mystified. He drew his foot away, and, leaning, pulled at the man's arms.

Slowly the fanatic came upright. As if blinded by the rays of a dazzling sun, he stared, yet affected to avert his face.

Clif threw out his arms expressively, as if to invite an explanation.

The foreigner put out a finger. Like a dart it moved towards Clif's breast.

"That?" breathed Clif. "Ah, I understand at last!"

The indicating finger had rested momentarily, timidly, reverentially, on the pin that the new plebe had given Clif that morning.

The mute lowered his eyes servilely; he crossed his hands in submission.

The naval cadet was instantly enlightened—he even marvelled that he had not thought before of a connection between the ring and the pin.

That queer skull head was the insignia, the talisman, of some potent order, content to serve which blindly, wickedly was this man.

Unquestioningly he had obeyed Treyser because he wore that symbol on his hand.

Now unfalteringly he posed before Clif, ready for any



fate that pleased the owner of that pin upon the breast.

Clif guessed a fact important and useful. If the ring governed, the pin swayed absolute.

In its wearer it was evident that the foreigner fancied he saw a superior master of the order.

And, now, having obeyed the directions of an inferior, he was shocked at what he had done, expecting, inviting punishment for his fearful mistake.

All this Clif Faraday traced in the flash of a second's time.

At present and hereafter this man was his slave—the power of Treyser diminished in the blazing effulgence of the ruby pin.

Clif decided what he would do, and started to do it.

He tapped the foreigner on the shoulder—the man looked up, respectful, submissive.

Clif pointed away from the cellar room. He indicated that the foreigner was to lead the way out, with caution.

The latter nodded his head intelligently. His nimble expert hands ran a rapid pantomime.

He was trying to express something, and Clif was studying the movements intently, when, one hand swung out to convey a direction, Clif's eyes lifted.

Their sweep incidentally crossed the end of the room. With a slight cry and a dodge just in time, Clif dropped down.

He jerked his startled companion off his footing quite as summarily.

For, out upon the still air of the cellar, rang forth a sharp, sudden pistol shot.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE CRITICAL MOMENT.

A bullet whistled harmlessly over the heads of Clif and his companion.

A second cut whizzing closer past Clif's dodging form.

The shooter stood in the doorway, the only one letting into the cellar, and Clif recognized him at once.

It was the man who had operated the trap that let down and the rug that let up on the floor above.



He had returned to the cellar, it seemed, after seeing Treyser started on his journey.

He had noiselessly opened the door, and he had been stationed there watching, Clif knew not how long.

Those two shots told his opinion of matters as they stood up to date.

"He has seen everything—he guesses everything!" breathed Clif animatedly.

It was a moment of general enlightenment, it seemed, for there was a stir then—a flitting by Clif's side.

The foreigner saw and translated the new complications.

Blindly he had veered from subordinate submission to Treyser and his friends to total devotion towards Clif—the wearer of the potent ruby pin.

He described a wild, reckless dive for the doorway with purpose unmistakable.

It was to pounce upon, disarm, the man who, with five shots left in his revolver, felt it his duty to make sure of crippling or killing the half-escaped prisoner and the palpable traitor.

Slam!

Treyser's accomplice evidently feared to face that spry whirlwind of action and savage strength, the foreigner.

He turned from the threshold, and the door—great, heavy, ponderous—closed tight in the face of the flying fanatic.

Then on its other side a sliding bar, a jangling lock, told Clif that they were shut in securely.

It was two lives in peril now—for Treyser's accomplice had discovered the foreigner's sudden change of base.

Clif heard a shrill, sharp whistle beyond the barricaded door.

Over this the foreigner ran his hand once, accepting the fact that it was impregnable without more ado.

He ran back to Clif, his eyes on fire, his face working animatedly.

He pointed at the door, shook his head. He held up five fingers on one hand, two on the other.

"Seven!" murmured Clif.



Plainly the fanatic indicated that this number of enemies were at the ready behest of the man who had just locked them in.

Then he ran at the side wall of the cellar and knocked on it, pressed one palm directly under the spot.

Clif comprehended that some deft sense was taking a vibratory enlightenment from this double action.

The foreigner toed in the dust of the floor a rapid cross under a spot in the wall he settled on—Clif knew not yet wherefore.

He next ran over to a pile of sawdust, groped, extracted a long, bulky object.

"A crowbar!" muttered Clif.

It was not the usual way of the naval cadet to remain idle while peril brooded.

It was, further, his ordinary system to take the lead in all activities requiring brain and muscle.

Just in the present instance, however, Clif was forced to remain supine.

He only half understood what his strange companion was getting at.

But he believed he knew what he was about, and certainly his knowledge of the place gave him the right to assume the initiative.

The fellow, posing the bar as he would a spear, fairly ran at the point in the wall he had marked.

The door would have been easy to force with that powerful, pointed piece of steel, but there probably grouped superior numbers by this time.

Clif's would-be friend and champion made just one significant gesture ere he became absorbed in a task that seemed herculean.

He swept a quick, nervous wave towards the door, and Clif nodded comprehendingly.

"Watch out for intruders," he traced. "All right. But if they come, what then? One!"

The wiry, agile fanatic—plunging, boring, grinding, prying with the heavy steel bar—was working for his life. A brick fell out.

"Two—three!"

They began to drop rapidly. There were two layers.

Clif had taken out his sole weapon—his pocket knife.



He stood with one ear bent suspensefully towards the cellar door.

Ominous sounds echoed there. Quick talking, the moving of the bar enclosing the rattle of the lock.

"Through!" breathed the cadet. "The wall is perforated!"

The foreigner had dropped his bar. He had cleared a shoulder-broad aperture.

Into this he burrowed, his head exploring. It came out white with mortar dust.

He snatched anew at the bar. Clif wondered why. Then he surmised.

The wall was fully pierced. The way was open through the brickwork, but beyond——

But there was an obstacle. As the bar, working like a steam-driven piston rod, plunged rather than bored, Clif heard a woody, hollow tang.

"Some heavy butt or barrel," he guessed. "Quick!"

He spoke the word unthinkingly aloud, for, of course, his companion could not hear.

But Clif's light touch warned. The fellow shot back a glance at the door, understood. It was surely about to open.

The crowbar would be an effective weapon to beat back an onslaught, a rush. He read Clif's thought in this direction, too, probably—still, he kept on working.

The door was shaking, being pressed against. Clif noted it quiver.

Out, in, out, in—with fearfully rapid force the crowbar flew backwards and forwards.

"We won't make it!" decided Clif. "It's fight!"

The door jarred and creaked—in another second their enemies would be in possession.

Whiz!

Thump!

Thud! thud! thud!

Thus the crowbar, flying with the regular force of a piece of machinery.

Crack! clunk!

"Struck!" thrilled Clif.

There were so many nerve-distracting issues impend-



ing that Clif swayed in a rare fervor of excitement and suspense.

The crowbar had struck, and its wielder, too.

As the bar of steel crashed into or down what obstructed on the other side of the cellar wall, the foreigner followed its impetus.

The fanatic was carried forward headfirst into the aperture.

There he wriggled, striving to extricate.

An appalling shout at that instant filled the cellar room.

"They are getting away!"

And the door was dashed open, and five men sprang across its threshold.

Just at the critical moment!

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## CHAPTER IX.

### "IN A HURRY."

Clif dallied not a moment.

There were murderous dens in every busy city, and Annapolis had a representative one, it seemed.

At least there could be no question as to the ferocious intent of the men now piling into the cellar room.

Treyser's accomplice had massed them for murder, and in a single flitting glance Clif observed that they were all armed.

A pounce, a brief battle, and the miscreants would make sure that Treyser would never have reason to complain of their "fidelity and dispatch."

That one glance, and Clif sprang into action.

He dove towards the half invisible foreigner.

The latter had dove, had been driven, into the hole in the brick wall so as to wedge there.

Cliff pulled him out for two reasons—first, to range a nimble companion by his side, next to secure the crowbar as a weapon.

Out came the man, queerly convulsing, as though choked.



"The crowbar," began Clif. "Zounds! what is this?"

A splash struck him, spraying like a hose spurt.

He had noted that the foreigner was dripping when he extricated him.

Deluged, half suffocated, Clif further discovered—for, like a half-drowned being his companion was creeping out of range of the aperture.

Clif did not reach into the hole—he, too, sprang aside, and he dragged his companion to his feet.

A drenching shower shot out into the cellar room—just one.

It took the form of spray. Then it seemed to hiss up and weave up into a kind of hazy veil.

So dense did it instantly grow, that to Clif's astonishment it filled the whole apartment with a blue vapor, dimming and shutting out completely the men just crossing the threshold of the doorway.

It smarted the eyes and it dizzied the brain. Clif sniffed. A powerful chemical odor pervaded, but he could not trace its class accurately.

"What's this?" shouted a blaring voice.

"You see," was retorted.

"I don't see!" ejaculated the tones of Treyser's accomplice. Some cute trick of that snaky Greek?"

"Greek!" murmured Clif. "Good! I know that."

The Greek had revived as if from a shock—he was pulling vigorously at Clif's arm.

Bolt up to the aperture he dragged him—through it now was only a trickle, but a suffocating vapor filled.

The fanatic tore a strip from his girdle. He swept this across Clif's lips and nostrils, tying it lightly but rapidly behind his head.

Unmistakably he made his wishes known that Clif should creep, stoop, through the aperture.

Clif poked in his head. He received a pressing push.

He groped and tried to fix his glance, half through, but all was dim and vague.

Then out he burrowed, dropped a foot, and with a clatter, on a heap of hogshead staves, getting tangled in several iron hoops that whopped up and about at the pressure and movement of his form.



Through after him, almost atop of him, before he could get out of the way, Clif felt the foreigner land.

"Out of that beyond there!" murmured Clif, with a certain sense of relief; "but into, what?"

He struggled to his feet, but it was to take a weak, wavering plunge.

Despite the covering to lips and nostrils there assailed his senses a deadening, a suffocating influence that must soon overcome.

Amid their swaying bewilderment, Clif surmised what had happened.

This next cellar must be the storeroom of chemicals.

The barrel or vat that blocked the aperture the foreigner's lusty strokes with the crowbar had beaten into.

A stave loosened, driven in, the whole structure had collapsed.

Part of its contents had flooded the hole—the remainder now infused the air of the second cellar dangerously dense.

Clif would have fallen had not a wiry hand clutched him.

As it was, he swung helplessly on a dropping angle, even when half-steadied.

He felt himself lifted, dragged, carried along, but in a zigzag, uncertain progress.

The foreigner was well-nigh overcome himself, it was evident.

In the darkness he ran against barrels, pails, bottles—of a sudden he stumbled.

Clif shot from his grasp, landing huddled against a framework. He fancied it to be a window.

It was such, he ascertained, as he lifted one feeble hand. Clif pressed a pane—it gave.

The free air rushed in. The piece of cloth had long since been disturbed from Clif's face, and he felt his benumbed energies revive as at the touch of a spur.

The foreigner was instantly at his side, clutching him, groping slowly, cautiously along a wall.

He located a door. It opened. It was nearly dark outside. They stood in a disordered alley way.

Clif turned an ardent glance on the man who had struggled to save his life against such fearful odds.



"What is that?" he instantly ejaculated, for a great shock shook the building they had just left.

Immediately following came a flare. The beginning of a turmoil filled the air.

Clif could surmise what had occurred. Their tracks seemed covered.

Some one of the crowd that penetrated the cellar must have flared a match.

It had ignited the gaseous vapor. An explosion was inevitable, with the aftermath of a furious, destructive blaze.

The foreigner turned his glance only once towards the glare. He snatched at Clif's sleeve.

The naval cadet allowed him to pilot a course through an intricate network of alleys, yards and passageways.

There was a vacant lot that he essayed to cross towards a street.

In its centre stood a barn, and here some one was moving about, for the rays of a lantern showed.

At this evidence of the proximity of helpers, should they be pursued, the foreigner seemed to give way slightly to the reaction of the powerful strain he had resisted for the past half-hour.

Apologetically, rather, he detained Clif with a hand touch, and sank to a heap of lumber.

"Wants to rest for a spell," traced Clif readily, and he nodded understandingly. "That will suit. It's due to think for a time, and plan."

Back of them, the distance of the square and a half they had traversed, a growing flare in the sky enlightened.

Fire was consuming the den from which they had just escaped.

"No use wasting time on the mob there," soliloquized Clif. "They are either victims or fugitives by this time."

Clif thought mainly of Treyser. He had probably departed from the city to meet his appointment with the politician's daughter.

As Clif went over all he had learned, he grew restive, excited.

He could scarcely bear the thought of a minute's de-



lay, and he nervously paced up and down, quite grudging the foreigner his necessary rest.

The latter had sunk almost flat on the boards. Clif hoped he would be speedy.

"He is too valuable, too devoted, to drop till I learn still more," decided Clif. "Soon as he braces up—why, of course, I must see Dazey first."

Clif quite unconsciously spoke aloud in the fervor of his meditations.

"Who said Dazey?" snapped on his hearing with the startling suddenness of a pistol shot.

Clif wheeled in a flash.

The door of the stable where he had seen the light had opened and two persons coming out had, unnoticed, almost reached him.

"Why, I did," began Clif, somewhat vaguely.

One of the two who had overheard made a wild bound towards him.

"Why," he shouted in an ecstatic, hurrahing way, "the very fellow—Faraday!"

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## CHAPTER X.

### "VELVET FOOT."

"Dazey!" cried Clif in surprise, but with infinite pleasure.

It was the very person of all others in the world he cared most to see at that moment.

It was a question which was the most delighted of the two, although the new plebe was the vehement and vociferous one.

He tried to encompass the excited explanations crowding his mind in one utterance—only blurted incoherently, and then stared marvelingly at Clif's generally broken-up appearance and the recumbent foreigner on the boards.

"Hello!" he cried, as he caught sight of the dusky, swarthy face; "hello! hello!"

"Do you know him?" demanded Clif.

"I have seen him before—he's one of the Greeks."



"What are you doing here?" asked Clif, and took his turn inspecting the plebe's companion.

The latter was a young fellow of rather sporty appearance.

"Blake—know him," nodded Dazey curtly.

The other ducked his head.

"Rides Velvet Foot," added Dazey. Then in a whisper, "I know all sorts—but a famous horse, you know."

"Yes, I know," assented Clif.

"And a famous jockey."

The jockey was in bad shape just now, it seemed, for he carried one arm in a sling.

"A minute of your time," suggested Clif, beckoning the new plebe to one side.

"A minute of yours!" retorted Dazey. "I haven't been worried! Where have you been? I took leave and have been hunting."

"What made you leave the action room?" questioned Clif, referring back.

"Why, to get money that might be needed in that bidding. When I got back you was gone—crowd said to the academy. I waited there two hours. Then I got wild. I hunted in a strange city. I heard his crowd was here," and Dazey hunched a shoulder towards the jockey. "I made for them."

"Why?"

"They're pretty metropolitan, and I just hit the sure conviction that you had tumbled up against Treyser. These fellows—knew them in New York—are up to most crooked layouts, and might pilot me against Treyser."

"You are right," said Clif. "I did tumble up against Treyser, as you express it."

"I said so!"

"Let me tell you how."

With jaws dropping and eyes staring, Dazey listened to the first section of Clif's recent exploits.

He got on fire all at once as Clif told the rest.

"I knew Treyser wasn't after that satchel for nothing!" cried Dazey. "Faraday, I can hardly talk, I'm so rattled at what you tell me. I am stunned—dumbed!"



"You may well be," observed Clif bluntly. "If we do not learn where Treyser is to meet your cousin——"

"But we must!" almost shouted Dazey in a vehement outburst. "But how? how?"

Clif's eyes snapped with animated thought.

"You say this man is a Greek?" he interrogated.

"That crowd all are."

"He is deaf and dumb. Greek! My knowledge of it is not practical. See here!"

"Yes, yes! You have an idea, I see it!" fluttered Dazey.

Clif waved him back and glided over to the recumbent foreigner.

"Oh, this is too bad!" he uttered instantly, and in vivid dismay.

The Greek had collapsed. The strain of the hour had knocked him out—he was quite insensible.

Clif shook him, felt his pulse, formed a ready decision.

"Dazey," he said abruptly, "do two things for me?"

"Just mention!" retorted the new plebe, with eagerness.

"Seconds count, maybe."

"I'll make them, for my share."

Clif pencilled a few lines on a card.

"Go to that place," he cried; "and run. You'll find a little queer man—he is a locksmith. Tell him to fly!"

"I'll make him—back here?"

"Right here."

"And the other thing?"

"Ask your friends to assist me in every way I desire."

"He'll do it!" and Dazey swung over to the jockey, whispered, waved an energetic hand at Clif, and shot away like an arrow.

"Is there a place in the stable yonder where we can lay this man comfortably?" asked Clif of the jockey.

"Sure thing—do I help?"

"If you will."

Clif found the interior of the stable like a room. In a stall that was parlor-like in its contrast to most such compartments, blanketed and superb, stood a steed that Clif understood to be the famous Velvet Foot.



The jockey brought water. It was no easy task to revive the Greek. They had just succeeded when voices sounded outside.

The man Clif had sent for was an educated locksmith, with whom the cadet had struck up quite an acquaintance.

Clif knew him to be a proficient linguist—knew him, further, to be grateful and devoted for the gift of some rare Spanish books Clif had brought from Cuba—treasures, in their way.

Clif had indicated what he wanted on the card sent through Dazey—they had made good time in reaching the stable.

"All right!" bobbed the short, puffing locksmith, bustling into evidence.

Clif nodded his thanks for the prompt response to his note.

He glided to the man's side and whispered rapidly in his ear, receiving vehement, comprehending nods to all his directions.

"Now, then, to one side," spoke Clif to Dazey, and the new plebe and the jockey drew back.

The antiquarian approached the Greek, who, just aroused, sat collecting his bewildered wits.

He stared repellantly at the old man, but as Clif made a reassuring gesture became at once tractable and attentive.

The locksmith drew from his pocket a pad of paper—soon it was covered with the Greek alphabet.

Clif had rarely ever been so absorbed as was he in the singular by-play that now took place.

Just as Treyser had done, the old linguist pointed at this letter, at that, conveying words, sentences, intelligently to the mute.

The eyes of the latter sparkled with zest as he continued.

Then his fingers flew, and a rapid, silent exchange of words took place.

Clif glowed with satisfaction. He felt that circumstances had favored the partial untying of a most difficult knot.



It was a picture to remember—that wordless conversation.

It ended in a significant double movement on the part of the fanatic.

He held up eight fingers—he dipped one of them in the water that had sopped to the floor from the bandage Clif had placed across his head to revive him, and trailed a snakelike line there.

"Got what you want!" said the antiquarian, gliding to Clif's side.

"Good!"

"That man Treyser was a superior officer of the order his ring represented."

"You mean pretended to be!" corrected Dazey. "He stole the ring from us and imposed on this fellow."

"As it may be," nodded the antiquarian; "only according to that pin, you, Faraday, are the chief, a top-notch exclusive, and your will is law."

"But Treyser, where has he gone?" questioned Clif, impatiently.

"The Greek knows, for he was there once recently."

"He can describe it?"

"He has. That trail of wet is the river."

"Ah!"

"Those eight fingers——"

"The hour!" cried Clif, comprehensively. "At eight that villain is to meet——"

"My cousin!" fluttered Dazey, showing excitement.

The antiquarian began to trace on his tab, explain by description a locality, a spot.

"I know it!" cried Clif; "there the river bends. Then a town. Then an old hut. But how has Treyser gone?"

However Treyser had taken his journey, he had a four hours' start.

Dazey was trembling with suspense and excitement.

"Faraday," he fluttered poignantly, "can you make it?"

"In two hours?" murmured Clif dubiously. "I think I know the place where Treyser has gone, but it's a long stretch!"

Dazey's face fell blank.

"The railroad—why, even a special train!" he cried.

"It's off the railway circuit."



"And the telegraph?"

"That, too."

"Then, Faraday—you, too," to the jockey— "that man must be nabbed! My uncle would give all he has. Six now—at eight the meeting. At any cost—say, Velvet Foot!"

With a start the jockey drew back—with a stare Clif read his dismayed face.

"Yes," went on Dazey ardently; "Velvet Foot could make it!"

"Perhaps," nodded the jockey, "but——"

"It's got to be!"

"I wouldn't dare!"

"You've got to dare!"

"If she ain't in trim for the race to-morrow——"

"We'll settle the stakes!"

"If she should get hurt——"

"It's twenty thousand dollars! My uncle will pay it!" declared Dazey. "Tom, I befriended you once!"

"Did you—saved me!"

"Can I take Velvet Foot?"

"That is not the question!" spoke Clif Faraday sharply.

"Eh?"

"No—can I take Velvet Foot?"

"Oh, Faraday!" gasped Dazey, choking up with gratitude.

"Get the horse ready—don't lose a second, and I may make it!"

If flying would bring it about, the start of ten minutes later promised well, for, mounted on the superb steed, Clif fairly skimmed the ground.

It was when fully past the city and out upon the smooth moonlit country roads, however, that Clif pressed the horse to its mettle.

He felt a rare thrill of enthusiasm as the splendid thoroughbred, realizing the pressure of a master hand, spurred to the work it had to do.

Clif calculated time, distance, ability—he felt that from the Greek's description he could locate the place of appointment to which evidently Treyser had preceded him, also mounted.



Where the roads grew less straight and wound in and out among rocks and forests, Clif tried to utilize a previous general knowledge of the locality.

He essayed one short cut and saved time and distance.

He started another. This was more intricate, but he was sure he would strike a road and economize time by keeping straight ahead.

The horse dashed on as if sure of its rider.

Clif made a sharp turn that promised a plateau-like expanse beyond.

Too late the naval cadet faced a curdling climax to his wild night ride.

It was impossible to stop the horse, but he might leap and save himself.

Not ten feet ahead was the sheer and abrupt edge of a bluff.

Beneath, thirty feet down was a stretch of water.

"Without the horse I can never reach my destination in time!" ran swiftly through Clif's thoughts; "I'll stick!"

And over, arrow-like, aimed through nothingness to the deep water below, went reckless horse and rider!

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE SURE SHOT!

Snap!

"Caught!"

That splash into the water beneath the bluff had been startling to Clif Faraday, but this new demonstration was ominous.

Clif had done wisely in sticking to the horse. It had met the fall to the water bravely, had carried him on briskly as ever, dry land again reached; had delivered him safely within twenty yards of his present environment not five minutes since.

Clif felt sure that a light showing through the trees was the hut that the Greek had described—his destination, the place of Treyser's appointment.



He had dismounted, advanced cautiously in its direction. Snap! Clif was caught, indeed!

"A trap!" he winced.

An enormous animal trap encased one limb from the knee down.

This it did by pressure purely, but where his shoe rested a second contrivance encased his foot in a pain-inspiring grip.

"If I can force out," began Clif. "Registered!"

Yes, the naval cadet was just that! For in the direction of the light a buzzing bell began to fire out its alarm notes.

"Connected!" soliloquized Clif. "Hold on!"

There was a rustle in the bushes near to him. Clif wavered, dodging.

A human hand shot out, extending a gleaming revolver.

"Who are you?" growled a darkly suspicious voice.

"You are Treyser, anyway!" murmured Clif. "This is unfortunate."

"Why, a cadet! Why, the one—Faraday! How did you get here? Why, followed!"

Amazed, incoherent, Treyser sprang upon Clif and bore him over. Once he pressed the pistol to his head.

Then he paused, breathed hard, staring about as if fearing other intruders.

"Ropes!" he muttered, springing up nimbly. "You'll tell!" and darted away.

"I'll not!" breathed Clif; "but I will get free! Not so easy! Ah! she comes! Look here!"

Clif had disentangled. He sprang free. An idea struck him.

He ripped off his coat and hat, and he adapted both to a short log of wood, placing this right against the trap that had so lately imprisoned him.

Then, planning a coup on the decoyed, deluded Treyser that would be signal and effective, Clif grabbed up a cudgel, dove behind a bush at the sound of approaching footsteps.

It was Treyser returned, and he carried some ropes and a knife. Up to the decoy, over it he bent—Clif pounced upon him.



A blow did not even phase the muscular villain. He arose, Clif clinging on his back, beating out vigorously.

"You're hard to beat!" he hissed.

Clif thought so, too.

"But I'll beat you!"

Crack! thud!

Clif could not act in time, and suffered. The wily rogue had thrown himself backwards!

This landed Clif against a great log, and his adversary upon him.

Clif stretched out limp as a rag—his senses deserted him.

"I'll fix, I'll finish——" began Treyser viciously. "What's that?"

It was Velvet Foot, gently neighing and moving where Clif had left her, and Treyser ran to the spot.

Clif opened his eyes five minutes later, surprised to find himself alive and unhampered.

Then he discovered that Treyser had trusted to luck that he lay quiescent long enough for him to get away.

For the villain had taken the alarm—had been urged by this unaccountably swift appearance of Clif into instant flight, it seemed.

A scream rang out from the direction of the hut.

It brought gallant Clif Faraday to his feet with a bound.

"A woman's scream!" he thought. "Whose?"

He could readily surmise—the cousin of the new plebe.

She had kept her appointment with the treacherous Treyser, had probably delivered over the money, the jewels, which, she expected, would buy her immunity from a heartless schemer.

And now the double-dealing knave was carrying out his original design—was aiming to get her away from a vicinity to which he had been tracked, to blackmail her wealthy father for her restoration.

Clif flew towards the hut.

"Beaten!" he voiced, and fairly staggered as he came within sight of the road.

Treyser had made sure of distancing all possible pursuers.



"He's taken Velvet Foot!" muttered the dismayed Clif.

The clear moonlight afforded Clif a glimpse of the scudding thoroughbred, its triumphant rider, the struggling feminine form across the saddle bow, ere a dash past a row of trees shut them out of view.

Clif rushed past the open door of the hut, paused, ran in.

Its interior was in disorder—against the table rested a rifle.

"Loaded?" breathed Clif, picking it up. "Yes!"

There was a queerly grim look in the steady, plucky eyes as Clif glided outside again.

He took up a position commanding the road. Fifty yards beyond was a break in the trees.

That horse and its burden must soon pass.

Clif leveled. A blur blazed the gap in the landscape.

Clif pulled the trigger—sure of aim, resolute, though mighty regrets haunted.

"It's twenty thousand dollars!" murmured Clif; "but he's stopped!"

A shrill neigh of pain, a fearsome yell, a wild, echoing shriek, mingled with the sharp report of the rifle.

Then there was a plunge, a crash of twigs and branches, and all was still.

Clif threw down the rifle and ran for the road and the spot where his true aim had halted a desperate scoundrel escaping with booty and beauty.

The naval cadet had his hands full for the next hour.

Treyser had received a fearful fall upon some rocks, breaking both arms.

Clif found upon him the certificate and money and jewels to a large amount of value, which he had deluded out of the credulous Miss Dazey.

The latter was badly shaken up, but no bones were broken. She revived, more frightened than injured.

The horse had received the bullet in the neck. Clif did not neglect the splendid thoroughbred, and stanching and nursed its wound promptly.

That telling shot—Clif Faraday's winning card in a desperate game—did not cost the Dazeys twenty thousand dollars, for Velvet Foot, except for a scar, would



show up, "the pick of the bunch," just the same as before that wild night dash.

Clif was relieved to hear this at Annapolis the next day, at the hotel where the New York politician received his daughter with fervent gratitude.

Clif's discoveries had given her back her rightful name, and Treyser, a wreck, was headed for the hospital, en route for a jail.

The Greek was to go back to their home with the Dazeys.

"Faraday," said admiring, enthusiastic, hero-worshipping Dazey, as he wrung Clif's hand fervently; "from this on I scratch the Spartan youth!"

"Come, now," smiled Clif modestly.

"And Napoleon and Alexander, and the rest of the history crowd!"

"All right," nodded Clif.

"For you're a twenty-five to one in a winter book against the whole bunch!"

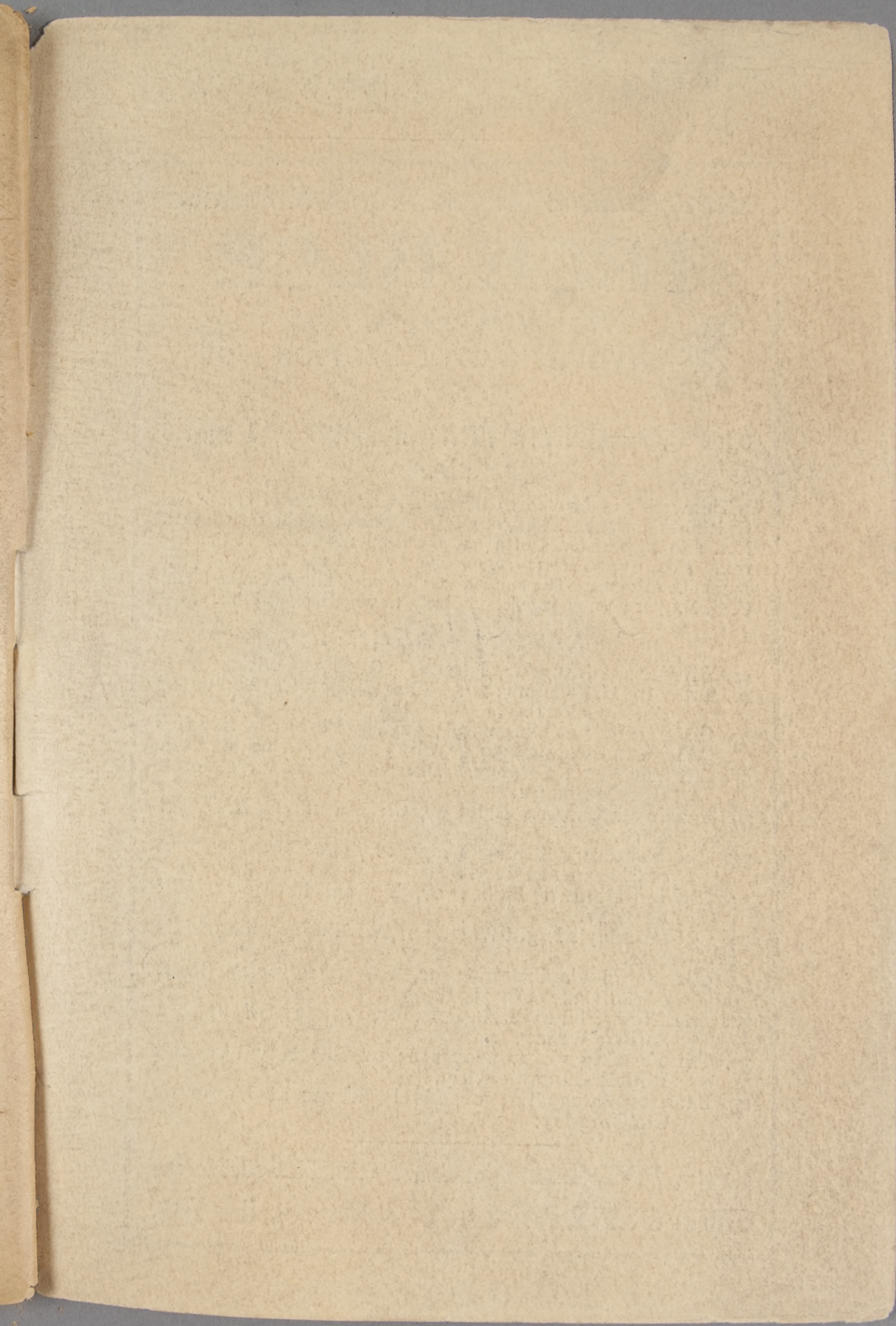
"Am I?"

"And not a thing doing—oh, easy!"

(THE END.)

The next book will contain "Ten Fathoms Deep: or, Clif Faraday's Intrepid Dive," by Ensign Clarke Fitch, U. S. N.







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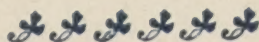
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